



The Simplified College Application

BY KAITLYN SAMOVAR

Today, getting into college proves one of the most difficult and time-consuming tasks. Without a special formula, parents and students rely on college counselors to get the extra support and secret tips needed to compile a well-balanced application. Stephanie Meade, owner of Collegiate Edge in Studio City, and Sonja Montiel, owner of College Confidence in Westlake Village and a former employee of the admissions office at UC Santa Barbara, offer countless tutoring services in addition to college counseling. College counselors like Stephanie and Sonja make the application process less stressful, helping students with everything from SAT prep courses to a personalized essay.

With universities moving toward the holistic/comprehensive review process, all aspects of the application remain equally important. However, an admissions counselor at the University of Columbia confesses that the academic transcript and test scores continue to serve as the backbone to

every application. Stephanie and Sonja stress the importance of taking a challenging course load as early as ninth grade. Students should not start high school with the belief that they can take AP classes during junior year without taking the preparatory honors courses. In order to enroll and excel in AP courses, students must be on the Honors/AP track, which starts freshman year. In fact, universities encourage students to take the most challenging classes available and prefer applicants to receive a B in an AP course rather than an A in a college preparatory class.

Universities desire students who also demonstrate involvement in extracurricular activities, for example, playing sports all four years of high school, the student shows commitment, by serving as team captain or coaching a youth team, the college applicant demonstrates leadership and a passion for the sport.

In addition to building an impressive résumé, students must complete a number of essays. Stephanie, Sonja, and an admissions counselor at the University of

Columbia tell students that the essay is the only place for the university to hear the student's voice and for the applicant to speak on his/her own behalf. Sonja explains, "ten percent of the essay should describe the experience/person/event being discussed, and the remaining ninety percent should answer the so what question." Most universities also require specific letters of recommendations. Stephanie says that students should choose a teacher whose recommendation would show "how a student rises to the occasion, overcomes classroom challenges, or behaves in the learning community—information that cannot be found on a transcript." Furthermore, because many colleges demand a recommendation from a high school counselor, Stephanie advises students to get to know their counselor on a personal basis.

While trying to maintain their grades and continue community involvement, students can alleviate stress by remembering that there is truly a school for everyone. Stephanie explains, "there are over 2,000 four-year colleges in the U.S., but we tend to think about the same twenty-five. Students must begin the college process by broadening their search" to find the school that best meets their needs. **WM**